

Hon. A. A. Alden

With kind regards of

Humbert Rice

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UNVEILING OF THE STATUE OF LA SALLE

LINCOLN PARK, CHICAGO

October 12, 1889.





CEREMONIES

ATTENDING THE

UNVEILING OF THE STATUE

OF

ROBERT CAVELIER DE LA SALLE

AT

LINCOLN PARK, CHICAGO,

OCTOBER 12, 1889.

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CEREMONIES.

AT the hour appointed for the ceremonies to begin a large crowd of persons had assembled on and around the improvised platform erected near the statue, including members of the Chicago Historical Society, and the local French societies. Among those present were President William C. Goudy and his colleagues of the Lincoln Park Board, General Joseph Stockton, H. N. May, Andrew E. Leight and John Worthy, also, Mr. Edmond Bruwaert, Consul of France at Chicago, Victor Gerardin, president of the French Benevolent Society; Edward Bobe, president of the "Cercle Francaise de Chicago," Alfred Gouere of the "Alliance Francaise," Senator C. B. Farwell, Honorable J. Young Scammon, Ex-Mayor R. B. Mason, General A. C. McClurg, Hempstead Washburn, General H. H. Thomas, Charles F. Grey, General William A. Strong, Honorable J. K. Edsall, A. H. Burley, John A. Enander, E. S. Dreyer, J. J. Healey, L. Proudfoot, and a large number of ladies.

At 3:30 P. M. President Goudy, after welcoming in a few well-chosen words, the company invited to assist in the ceremonies, requested Mr. Taylor, Secretary of the Lincoln Park Board, to read the letter of the Honorable Lambert Tree, presenting the statue to the Park, and the letter of the President of the Board accepting the gift.

Mr. Taylor then read, in a clear voice, the correspondence, as follows :

CHICAGO, July 8, 1889.

TO THE HONORABLE, THE COMMISSIONERS OF
LINCOLN PARK, CHICAGO:

Gentlemen:—Recently, while residing abroad in an official capacity, I caused to be executed in bronze a statue of Robert Cavelier de La Salle, and my purpose in doing so was that I might on my return home offer it as a gift to Lincoln Park.

The explorations of La Salle are, as you know, largely identified with the western and northwestern portions of North America which now form so important a part of the United States. In studying the early history of the country, the services and character of La Salle have inspired me with the highest admiration, which I am sure is equally shared by all others who have read the story of his achievements.

He unquestionably discovered the Ohio and Illinois rivers, and whatever may be the weight of

evidence as to the real discoverer of the Mississippi, I think it is beyond controversy that he was the first white man who ever descended that river to its mouth.

Accompanied by a score of Frenchmen, he navigated the river in open canoes to its mouth as early as 1682, and took possession of a country extending north and south from the twenty-fifth to the fiftieth parallel of north latitude, and east and west from the Alleghanies to the Rocky Mountains.

That territory probably contains now nearly or quite 35,000,000 of people of European origin, and embraces many of the fairest states of the American Union.

La Salle's faithful lieutenant, Henri de Tonty, speaks of him as one of the greatest men of his century. Certain it is that he was a man devoted to great designs, from the pursuit of which neither danger, fatigue, famine, disease, disappointment nor treachery could divert him. It is impossible to trace the immense course of his journeyings on this continent through winter blasts and summer suns, without arriving at the conclusion that he was a hero of the highest type, to whose geographical discoveries American civilization owes a heavy debt.

To those of us whose lot has been cast on the shores of the great lakes and in the valley of the

Mississippi he is an historical figure of the deepest interest, for it may be truly said that he was the first white man who penetrated the western wilderness and sent back word to Europe of the vast empire here that awaited the touch of the hand of civilization to bring it into being.

With his explorations of the interior of the North American continent the history of the Mississippi valley really begins. Before that time it was a *terra incognita* to all the world, and if we endeavor to gaze into the mist which covers the early past of the land where we and our children live, the figure which always emerges from the gloom is that of the intrepid French explorer. La Salle therefore belongs as much to our history as to that of France, and it seems appropriate that a monument should be erected to his memory in this proud city of a million people, which stands in the center of the superb country with which his name is so inseparably associated, and on the site of which he camped as early as 1682, when there was not a white man outside of his own small party within a thousand miles of the place.

The statue which I now have the pleasure to offer to Lincoln Park, is the work of the Count Jacques de Lalaing, a Belgian sculptor of distinction, and represents the explorer at a point at which he is supposed to have the first view of one

of the rivers which he has the credit of having discovered.

If the Commissioners will do me the honor to accept it, I ask permission to confer with them at some time which may suit their convenience as to the choice of the site in the Park, on which I may proceed to erect the pedestal for its reception. I have the honor to be, gentlemen, with the highest respect, your obedient servant,

LAMBERT TREE.

OFFICE OF THE
COMMISSIONERS OF LINCOLN PARK,
CHICAGO, July 25, 1889.

HON. LAMBERT TREE:

Dear Sir:—I am directed by the Commissioners of Lincoln Park to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 8th instant, and to accept your generous offer of a bronze statue of Robert Cavelier de La Salle, to be placed in Lincoln Park on a pedestal which you propose to erect at your own expense.

Among the great and brave men who explored the American continent and laid the foundation for its development, there is no one entitled to greater credit than La Salle. In the short period of five years he traversed the country from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico, establishing forts and settlements, and brought this magnificent part of

the world to the attention of civilized Europe. He exhibited in the highest degree both patriotism and statesmanship, seeming to comprehend something of the events of the succeeding two centuries.

You do well to present in desirable form to the present and future generations a figure of the man who made it possible for them to enjoy the rich productions and luxuries of this great country.

It will teach the youth who may visit the Park a historical and geographical lesson in the most impressive manner. While we have not yet had the pleasure of beholding the statue itself, yet the photograph indicates that it will be a pleasure as a work of art, creditable alike to the artist and his patron.

It will afford me pleasure to confer with you as to a suitable location, at your convenience.

Very respectfully,

W. C. GOUDY,
President Lincoln Park Commissioners.

The statue, which hitherto had been concealed from public view, by reason of being draped by the flag of the United States, was then unveiled, and its appearance was greeted with an enthusiasm which indicated full appreciation, by the audience present, of the character and services of the illustrious explorer.

Mr. Goudy then introduced Mr. Edward G. Mason, President of the Chicago Historical Society, who delivered the following oration:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:—A great name is a precious possession for any people. And the dwellers in this region have a special right to include the name of La Salle among their treasures, because he was the real discoverer of the Great West, in which they live, and because he was the possessor of the qualities which constitute true greatness. Here, at least, his life and deeds should never be forgotten. And it is especially fitting to recount them when citizens of Chicago come together to celebrate the erection of a statue in his honor.

Almost two hundred and fifty years ago, in the gray old town of Rouen, in the ancient French province of Normandy, was born a son to a wealthy merchant of the Cavelier family. His relatives possessed a landed estate called La Salle, from which this youth took the name which was to supersede that given him in baptism. His full signature was René-Robert Cavelier de la Salle, but he dropped one appellation after another until he used only the title by which he will be forever known, and signed himself simply De la Salle.

At the age of twenty-three he came to Canada and obtained a grant of land at the head of the island of Montreal. He heard the stories which the natives told of mighty rivers far to the westward, and gave to the La Chine rapids the name which preserves to this day the memory of his dream of a water way to China. Soon he received more definite accounts of the great stream, Ohio, meaning in the Seneca tongue, "The Beautiful River," and planned an expedition to it, hoping thus to find a route to the sea. And in July, 1669, he embarked on his first voyage to the west with two priests, who accompanied him to Lake Ontario, where they parted company. During the next two years, La Salle was incessantly traversing the wilderness between the Ohio and the lakes, sometimes with Frenchmen, sometimes with Indians only, and sometimes alone, "with no other guide," says his faithful lieutenant, Tonty, "than a compass and his own genius." It is certain that in these two years he discovered the river Ohio, and followed it to the falls at the site of Louisville, and it is probable that he discovered the Illinois river also. It is possible, moreover, that he was the first of white men to visit the place where Chicago stands, and that he crossed the portage between our river and the Des Plaines in 1671, or two years before Joliet and Marquette were here.

At all events, these explorations revealed to La Salle the character of the country south and west of the Great Lakes, and it is quite certain that he reached the prairies. For in his memorial to the great French minister, Calbèrt, he says he has seen a region "so bountiful and fertile, so free from forests, and so full of meadows, brooks and rivers, that one will find there, in plenty, all that is needful for the support of flourishing colonies." These colonies he resolved to plant in this fair land, and to win for France a new domain. He had become satisfied that the Mississippi emptied into the Gulf of Mexico. And the grand scheme which his brain conceived, was to determine that fact, to open the river to commerce, to colonize the fertile west, and to establish a chain of fortified posts from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf.

The Jesuits opposed him because they desired to be both church and state among the natives. The Canadian merchants were hostile, because they desired a monopoly of trade. But Count Frontenac, Governor of Canada, was his friend, and a visit to France in 1674, obtained him the grant of a seignory at the entrance to Lake Ontario. This was the first step in his enterprise, and in 1675, on the plateau now occupied by the city of Kingston, in Upper Canada, he built a stone fort, armed it with cannon, and named it Fort Frontenac. "Had he

preferred gain to glory," says the Marquis de Seignelay, "La Salle had only to stay at his fort, where he was making more than 25,000 livres a year." But he regarded wealth only a means to an end, and as soon as he had accumulated the needed resources, his eager spirit led him onward. He required royal authority for what he proposed to do, and went again to France in 1677, and obtained from Louis XIV. the right to make discoveries and build forts in the western parts of New France, and to find if possible a way to Mexico. He returned with a small party enlisted in his service, and among them was one man who was equal to an army. This was Henry de Tonty, of Italian birth, a veteran of the wars of France, who became La Salle's most devoted friend and most trusted lieutenant, and who deserves to have a place in the annals of the West, second only to that of his great commander.

In the fall of 1678, La Salle sent an advance party from Fort Frontenac to Niagara. Father Hennepin was in this detachment, and thus became the first of Europeans to behold the mighty cataract of which he wrote the earliest known description. The suspicious Seneca Indians refused permission to build a vessel above the falls, and a fort at the mouth of the river. La Salle came, and the red men recognized their master, and granted what he desired. While absent on this mission,

his pilot disobeyed his express orders, and caused the shipwreck of the vessel which contained the supplies of the expedition, and the almost total loss of its cargo. "This," says Hennepin, "would have made any other man give up the enterprise." It only nerved La Salle to fresh exertions. He forthwith established his second fortified post upon the high point now occupied by Fort Niagara, and gave it the name of his friend, the Prince de Conti. Then leaving Tonty to complete the construction of a brigantine above the falls, the dauntless leader returned to Fort Frontenac to replace the outfit so needlessly destroyed. He made the journey of two hundred and fifty miles on foot, in mid-winter, over the ice of Lake Ontario.

Completing his preparations, the summer found him again at Niagara. Tonty had finished the vessel, which he named the Griffin, after the armorial bearings of Count Frontenac, and on August 7, 1679, they embarked on Lake Conti, which we call Lake Erie, in the little craft of forty-five tons burden. She deserves honorable mention, for she was the pioneer of our lake marine, the fore-runner of a vast commerce, and it was perhaps a prophetic incident that her flag bore not only a griffin, but an eagle. She landed the party at the entrance to Green Bay, and was sent back with a cargo of furs to return with supplies for a new colony at the

Illinois, and materials for a new vessel with which to descend the Mississippi. La Salle pushed on with fourteen men in canoes along the western shore of Lake Michigan, which he called Lake Dauphin. Battling with storms by day, threatened by hostile Indians in their night encampments, one of which perhaps was not far from the spot where we meet to-day, and almost at the point of starvation, they reached the mouth of the St. Joseph, and built Fort Miami. Thence they went by the Kankakee and the Illinois to Peoria Lake, where the Illinois Indians had winter quarters. With them La Salle formed cordial relations, and overcame their objections to his Mississippi voyage. But by this time he had become satisfied of the loss of the Griffin, of which nothing was ever heard beyond a rumor that the crew had sunk her, and fled to the woods with her cargo. In sadness of spirit he built just below the site of Peoria, Fort Crevecoeur, or Broken Heart, in January 1686, and this was the beginning of the first permanent settlement of white men in what is now Illinois. Then sending two of his men with Hennepin to explore the upper Mississippi and discover the Falls of St. Anthony, and leaving Tonty to hold the fort and continue work on a vessel, which he saw half built, for his Mississippi voyage, he resolved to return to Fort Frontenac for fresh supplies, and especially an equipment for his Mississippi vessel.

With only five men he set out in March, forced his way through the broken ice of the Illinois river, waded the Calumet marshes, crossed southern Michigan, traversed Lakes Erie and Ontario, and reached Frontenac in May, having traveled constantly for sixty-five days, in the worst of weather, over nearly one thousand miles of country, by a course which presented every kind of danger and difficulty, "the most arduous journey," says one chronicler, "ever made by Frenchmen in America."

Every kind of disaster confronted him here,—the shipwreck of a vessel in the St. Lawrence bringing his goods from France, the desertion and dishonesty of his men, and the adverse proceedings of his creditors. But he overcame them all, and embarked again with a new party, and by the Georgian Bay route reached Lake Huron, and passed down Lake Michigan, and by the rivers St. Joseph, Kankakee and Illinois, to Fort Crevecoeur. He found it in ruins and deserted. The terrible scourge of an Iroquois invasion had fallen upon the Illinois. Tonty, obliged to retreat by the way of the Desplaines and Chicago Portage, had reached at Green Bay the friendly Pottawattamies, whose chief was wont to say he knew but three great captains in the world,—Frontenac, La Salle, and himself. La Salle went to Fort Miami for the winter, and resolved to unite the tribes of the West in a common league

against the Iroquois, and to establish them around a fort, which he proposed to build on what is now called Starved Rock, in the valley of the Illinois. Returning once more to his seignory, he met Tonty at Mackinac, and the two paddled their canoes a thousand miles or more to Frontenac.

Here he appeased his creditors, obtained fresh advances, and began his enterprise for the third and successful time. His party of fifty-four rendezvoused at Fort Miami, in November 1688, and Tonty led the advance along Lake Michigan to the Chicago Portage, and so to the Illinois. La Salle followed a little later, and doubtless spent New Year's day of 1682 upon the site of our city, where he was snow-bound. The expedition journeyed down the Illinois upon the ice, reached the Mississippi in February, 1682, and floated down its waters until two months later they discovered its mouth. A column was erected bearing the arms of France, the name and titles of Louis XIV, and the date of the discovery, April 9, 1682. By that act France obtained her title to the valleys of the Ohio and the Mississippi, to which our nation has succeeded. And by that act civilization obtained a foot-hold on the banks of the Father of the Waters, and thenceforward steadily progressed along his lordly stream. And the name of the State of Louisiana to-day preserves the designation which La Salle gave to the whole of the

grand realm he added to the French crown. This was the culmination of his career. It would be interesting, did time permit, to narrate in detail the successful founding of his Illinois colony, and his final expedition, which he returned to France to lead to the mouth of the Mississippi, to plant a colony there. By error they passed the great river and located on Matagorda Bay, whence La Salle attempted to proceed to the Illinois for aid to his party; but was assassinated by some discontented villians in his band, on March 18, 1687, on the southern branch of the Trinity river, in what is now the State of Texas. So perished the great discoverer in the forty-fourth year of his age.

Such in brief compass was the life of him whom two centuries have not consigned to oblivion, but rather have added lustre to his name. And such was the man who has won from his contemporaries and from posterity encomiums like these: Says Tonty, faithful to his great leader unto the death, and crying out in anguish at his sad doom, "Behold the fate of one of the greatest men of his age, of a spirit wonderful, capable of accomplishing everything." Hennepin, who loved him little, was constrained to say, "He was a man of grand merit, constant in adversity, intrepid, generous, engaging, able, equal to anything." The French historian, Gravier, proudly writing of one

who like himself was born in Normandy, says, "He was as brave as the bravest, as pure as the purest, and as unfortunate as the most unfortunate. The Columbus of his age, when he fell beneath the assassin's ball he had achieved a discovery most glorious for France, most glorious for himself." And our own Parkman, who has most worthily told the story of his life, pays him this matchless tribute: "It is easy to reckon up his defects, but it is not easy to hide from sight the Roman virtues that redeemed them. Beset by a throng of enemies, he stands, like the king of Israel, head and shoulders above them all. He was a tower of adamant, against whose impregnable front hardship and danger, the rage of men and the elements, the southern sun, the northern blast, fatigue, famine and disease, delay, disappointment, and deferred hope emptied their quivers in vain.

* * America owes him an enduring memory, for in this masculine figure she sees the pioneer who guided her to her richest heritage."

And yet, despite all this, some have sought to decry the achievements of La Salle, because he was not the first, in point of time, to look upon the Mississippi. This was never claimed by or for him. Probably some bold Spaniard, whose name has not come down to us, navigating the Gulf of Mexico soon after the time of Columbus, was the earliest of white men

to see the Father of Waters. Others of his race followed, and De Soto died on its banks in 1542. But these purposeless and accidental visits were of no moment whatever. They did not reach the upper waters, and had no connection with the settlement of the valley. Joliet and Marquette doubtless discovered the Upper Mississippi, and Hennepin, at the instance of La Salle, ascended it to the falls. But no one of these descended it to the sea, or identified it with any of the streams known to fall into the Gulf.

It was La Salle, who in pursuance of a settled purpose and belief, completed the exploration of the Mississippi from the Falls of St. Anthony to the Gulf, solved the problem of the outlet of the mighty stream, which with its tributaries included the whole of the Great West, established communication between the sea and that vast region, and acquired its illimitable territory for France. So far as his predecessors are concerned, the Mississippi valley would have been a wilderness to-day. La Salle came, and with him civilization. He led the vanguard of a never-ending army whose march he directed, whose victories he planned. He passed through the wilderness a solitary figure, yet not alone, for at his back were the myriad hosts of progress; by his side commerce and law and government.

And as La Salle was a type, and the highest, of the qualities which have made the Great West what it is, it seems to be very appropriate that his statue should be erected in its commercial capital. It is proper, too, for another reason, in that the indomitable will, the tireless energy, and the courage in the face of adversity which he displayed, have been so repeated in the history of this city as to make its citizens kin in spirit to the great discoverer. Very fitting is it, furthermore, that the metropolis which has risen where two hundred years ago he was storm-stayed in a desolate wilderness, at the bleak portage whence he set out upon the expedition which was the crowning glory of his life, should cherish his memory, and treasure every remembrance of him.

So believing, the donor of this noble statue, by his generous gift, and the Commissioners of this Park, by their ready acceptance and the grant of this appropriate site, have done honor to themselves and to their community. It is well that in the Park which bears the name and is adorned by the statue of Lincoln, there should also stand the statue of another great man, identified as he was with the Great West, who, like Lincoln, fell by the assassin's hand, and like him wears the martyr's crown of those who have given their lives for a great idea. And could the spirit of La Salle for

a moment animate this masterly presentment of his outward form, and gaze upon the great city in which it stands, we can well imagine the satisfaction with which he would hail this realization of his splendid dream, and say, "For this I lived, for this I labored, and for this I died."

In conclusion of the exercises, the French Consul, Mr. Edmond Bruwaert, on the invitation of the President of the Board of Park Commissioners, and of Mr. Tree, also addressed the audience. The Consul spoke as follows :

MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT, MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE—

C'est très-aimable à vous de vouloir bien me demander, avant que cette cérémonie ne se termine, de dire quelques paroles dans la langue que les échos de ce rivage durent être fort surpris d'entendre, il y a deux siècles, lorsque Robert de La Salle, abandonnant la barque qui l'avait amené, posa pour la première fois le pied, ici même, sur ce sol qu'il venait de découvrir.

Mais que pourrais-je ajouter au magnifique éloge que vous venez d'entendre? Dans son éloquent discours, M. Mason ne vous a-t-il pas fait connaître le vaillant voyageur qui, tout jeune encore, dit adieu à une patrie dont aucun Français ne se sépare jamais volontiers, et vint, à travers mille dangers,

conquérir à la couronne de France un immense et merveilleux empire, au prix de souffrances sans nombre, au prix même de sa vie? M. Pierre Margry a publié les écrits de La Salle et tous ceux qui ont lu le récit touchant des voyages, des succès, des revers du modeste héros, dont nous voyons ici les traits, ne peuvent que partager les sentiments d'admiration qui viennent d'être si chaleureusement exprimés.

Toutefois, je suis heureux de saisir l'occasion que vous m'offrez de m'acquitter d'un devoir qu'il m'est très-agréable de remplir. Je tenais beaucoup, Monsieur le Ministre, à vous remercier de la bonne pensée que vous avez eue d'associer le Consulat de France et les Sociétés Françaises de cette ville à une manifestation qui fait le plus grand honneur à votre esprit élevé, à votre générosité et à la libéralité des administrateurs du Parc de Lincoln. Depuis que les conquêtes de La Salle sont devenues le patrimoine de la Nation Américaine, vous devez surtout à vous-mêmes d'avoir tiré un admirable parti de cette vaste région où chacune de nos familles Françaises pourrait aujourd'hui posséder un riche domaine. L'oubli du passé est assez fréquent dans la vie des peuples et vous auriez pu ne pas vous souvenir de celui qui a, le premier, livré à l'histoire ce nom de Chicago qui semble, d'après ce que nous avons sous les yeux, appelé aux plus surprenantes et aux plus brillantes destinées. Mais vous

avez tenu à ce que la mémoire de La Salle vécût parmi vous et vous avez voulu qu'une statue de bronze rappelât dans ce héros l'un de vos précurseurs et l'un des créateurs de votre magnifique cité.

Vous ne pouviez donner un plus haut enseignement à vos enfants : ils apprendront ici, dans ce Parc, au milieu de leurs jeux, que la volonté, le courage, la persévérance, sont des qualités, à la portée de tous, qui mènent invariablement l'homme au succès et qui même peuvent le placer au rang de ceux que le monde entier se plaît à honorer.

Comme Français, je suis profondément touché, Monsieur le Ministre, de l'hommage public et durable que vous consacrez ainsi à notre compatriote, car Robert de La Salle appartenait bien à cette nation qu'on trouve toujours en avant, qu'il s'agisse de science, de civilisation, de liberté. De ce côté comme de l'autre côté de l'Atlantique, tous les Français applaudiront à cette nouvelle marque de l'amitié inaltérable qui unit depuis longtemps et qui unira longtemps encore les deux Républiques. Vous n'aurez, d'ailleurs, pas à regretter d'avoir fait acte de justice envers ce noble et infortuné chercheur ; car, à travers les siècles, cette statue de bronze s'élèvera ici, sur la rive du Lac Michigan, comme un monument à la gloire de La Salle sans doute, mais aussi à votre gloire, Monsieur le Ministre, et à la gloire de cette grande ville.







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